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ABSTRACT

This newsletter issue focuses on toys, games, and activities that entertain special needs children and sharpen their ability to think, speak, and play with others. Play is beneficial to special children as it develops their creativity, helps them explore their environment, allows them to socialize, and provides opportunities for them to act out stressful situations. Such toys as balls, board games, magnetic letters and numbers, and dominos are recommended as inexpensive items that can enhance learning. Parents are encouraged to check the suitability of toys for their child's developmental level, to choose activities the child can be successful doing, and to remember that play should be fun. An article by Karen Meyer, "Fostering Your Child's Communication through Play," describes how special needs children can communicate their ideas and feelings through relaxed play. The article presents a chart of toys, games, and activities for playing alone and playing with others, at various age levels. An article by Leah Spring, "Learning Can Be Fun with Computers," outlines the value of computers as learning tools and notes possible computer adaptations to suit the needs of individuals with disabilities. The newsletter concludes with a column by George Popper titled "What is Play Therapy?" (JDD)

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Special Parent ★Special Child

Practical pointers for parenting handicapped children

VOL. 5, NO. 4 JULY/AUGUST 1989

TOYS AND GAMES THAT TEACH: MAKING THE MOST OF LEISURE TIME

Making the most out of summer vacation is a challenge for all parents. The cry of "what shall I do now?" is frequently heard, especially in families with a special needs child. Keeping easily bored special children occupied and amused when school is not in session can tax even the most inventive parent. Ideally, summertime is a relaxed and beneficial period where children have more time to explore, experiment and grow mentally and physically. In this issue we will focus on specific toys, games and activities that not only entertain, but that also sharpen the special child's ability to think, speak and play well others.

Why play is beneficial

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Through play children exercise more than their muscles. During games and play children are given the opportunity to explore their environment, develop their creativity and thus enhance their feelings of self-reliance and self-worth. A special child whose disability restricts him particularly needs the sense of freedom, spontaneity and accomplishment that can arise during play. Mastering the rules of certain games gives children a chance to learn how to take turns and cooperate with others. Playing games prepares children to sort out their feelings, especially when they gain experience in losing or winning gracefully. During play children are apt to quarrel, feel hurt and then make up—key ingredients in maturing and socializing with others.

Play promotes a child's alertness and if the youngster becomes absorbed in the activity, his attention span is apt to develop as well. There is also the possibility that a chance game can lead to a fascinating hobby. When a child is given the opportunity to choose activities or games he enjoys and to discard those that frustrate or displease him he is gaining the

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ability to make decisions and to develop a sense of identity. Through play, the special child can find ways to surmount difficulties. A physically disabled child, for example, who finds physical therapy sessions tedious often loses himself in the challenge of pretend games, resulting in physical exertion beyond anyone's expectations.

Pretend play—dressing up in grown-up clothes, playing house, doctor or tea party—is a way children imitate adult roles and learn to perceive the real world. Often play is an alternate way of acting out conflicts. For example, playing doctor when the child pretends he is the one in charge and not the helpless patient is one way of working through fears and feelings of powerlesness. Having a diabetic child, for instance, give a "shot" to his favorite stuffed animal can lessen his own discomfort.

Toys that teach

ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Linda Murphy, M.S., is the founder and for the past 15 years has been the director of a widely known, approved school for mentally handicapped children serving children ages 5-21 in Westchester County, NY, and surrounding areas. A lecturer, teacher and administrator, she is a foster parent and the parent of a handicapped child, too.

Suzanne Della Corte, M.S., for 15 Years co-director of the school, is responsible for curricula, staff development and supervision. She is author of numerous research projects in the field and has edited psychology textbooks for a leading New York publisher.

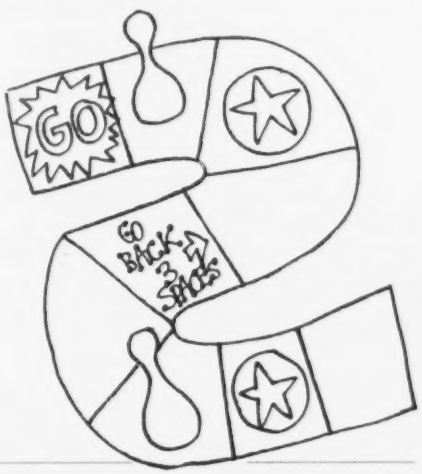
Toy stores and supermarket shelves abound with many inexpensive games and toys that, with some parent supervision, can be used to delight the special child and enhance his learning. Here is a sampling:

Playing ball is more than a fun activity. A simple game of catch improves hand-eye coordination and demonstrates the often difficult-to-grasp concepts of over, under, up, down, hard, soft, fast, slow, especially when paired with verbal description. If the child lacks adequate physical coordination, a slow-moving sponge ball or a bean bag is easier to use.

Board games such as Candyland® are often dismissed as inconsequential. However, on closer look, this easy to understand game demonstrates color, counting and reinforces such concepts as moving forward, taking turns, remembering who is next. As with all games there is the give and take of winner and loser, a helpful concept for all children.

Magnetic letters and numbers that stick to the refrigerator door not only entertain but can improve alphabet and number recognition. A magnetized "go fish" game where the child has to "catch" the toy with a magnetized hook and line is an excellent way to improve hand-eye coordination.

Dominos is another deceptively simple game. At the beginner's level children are required to match pictures or dots; as the game advances in complexity the players are required to remember numerous combinations of dots and numbers. This gives children of any age or developmental level



ABOUT SPECIAL PARENT/SPECIAL CHILD:

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good practice in visual memory which is an important aspect of reading and math.

Commercial toys such as Mattel's See and Say® can keep children amused for lengthy periods, are reliable teaching tools and, moreover, do not require adult intervention, providing the youngster is able to pull the cord that activates the speakers. Most special children require endless repetition and the See and Say series gives the child the opportunity to hear the same information presented over and over.

Do's and don'ts

Do make sure the toys and games you choose for your special child are suitable for his level of development. Ask his teacher or other parents before making any purchases. Forcing your child to engage in activities that are beyond him fosters needless frustration.

Do remember that the child with poor hand-eye or fine motor coordination will avoid or dislike activities that require this skill—art projects, coloring, tracing, cutting, for example. Try something he can succeed at such as squeezing a water-filled sponge ball, or take foam brushes found in hardware stores and have the youngster "paint" with colored water.

Do remember that play is fun. If your child is not having a good time, it's not play. Find out why he is not enjoying himself; perhaps the game or length of time required for the activity needs to be modified.

Do become aware that when no one plays with the disabled child because it is assumed he can't play or doesn't want to or doesn't know the rules of the game, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Little by little the special child who is not exposed to play with others becomes more self-absorbed, isolated and eventually avoids play altogether.

Fostering your child's communication through play

by Karen Meyer, M.A., C.C.C., Speech/Language Pathologist

The editors are pleased to have two guest writers share their ideas about helpful home activities.

Most children love to play and so do adults. We need to play to relax, to regroup, to learn about different facets of ourselves and others. Children with special needs, especially those with speech delays and disorders, **need** structured play to learn about the world and to communicate a variety of ideas and feelings. Babies and young children form their perceptions of the world and acquire language by exploring and handling various objects, primarily toys.

Unfortunately for many children with special needs, their play skills often lag behind, just as their communication and learning skills progress at a slower rate. By the time they are ready to re-enact their perceptions of their everyday lives through toys or recreational activities, society says it is inappropriate for the six-year-old to use toddler toys, or the nine-year-old to enjoy blocks or Fisher-Price sets. In school and many times at home, children with special needs are expected to "work," to "do academics." Play is left to the child's own devices during free time and, unfortunately, a vital avenue for learning is left untapped. It is through relaxed play that children learn about events in nature that cannot be found in books; how to

TOYS, GAMES & ACTIVITIES FOR COMMUNICATING THROUGH PLAY

	PLAYING ALONE		PLAYING WITH OTHERS	
	GOALS	**TOYS & ACTIVITIES**	**GOALS**	**TOYS & ACTIVITIES**
Non-verbal children (ages 3-8)	Develop concepts of color, size, shape and *in, off, on, under, out of, big, little* Develop understanding of action words (*put on, push, pull, get, go, make*) and phrases (*"all gone;" "no more"*)	Sorting boxes; color cones; nesting cups/boxes; puzzles; sewing cards; large blocks Play-doh®; water wheel; sand boxes; push-pull toys;TOMY® computer; Fisher-Price cash register®; musical jack-in-the-box; wind-up record player	Develop eye contact, imitation and cooperation with another person Develop turn taking; increased attention; demonstrate action words (*turn on, go, stop*) for purposes of comprehension	High activity social games: Ring Around the Rosey; Pat-a-Cake; bubbles; hand puppets; playing ball Dressing dolls (buttons, snaps); mechanical wind-up toys; battery-operated trains (or roller coasters, Disney® sets). GAMES: Lotto®; Memory®. BOOKS: pop-up nursery rhymes; in-out book, etc.
Younger children with delays in expression and comprehension (ages 5-10)	Develop meaningful language while acting out daily routines with toys Develop creative play and thinking skills	Etch-a-Sketch®; assorted Fisher-Price® sets; Playmobile® sets; Disney® sets; Sesame Street® (zoo, school, houses and figures) Dolls; carriages; kitchen sets with life-like sounds; garages; cars; playmats; Colorforms®; TOMY® computer; TOMY Supervision®; Mr. Potato Head®; Play-Doh®; water play; magic writing boards; Duplo Blocks®; Linxx® blocks	Develop turn taking; social language; basic language concepts and vocabulary Develop listening skills	GAMES: Don't Wake the Dragon®; Candyland®; Lotto®; Memory®; Alphabet Game®; Fishing Game®; Don't Tip the Waiter®; Ravensburger 4 First Games®; Hi-Ho! Cherry-O®; Bingo®. OTHER: simple cooking; puppets; musical chairs Story books with cassettes; reading and acting out nursery rhymes; Dr. Seuss books; pop-up books; large colorful dictionaries
Older children with autism or poor language skills (ages 10-18)	Develop meaningful inner thinking	Puzzles; Lego® blocks; Colorforms®; magnet boards with shapes; Linxx® blocks; sturdy mechanical toys; Play-Doh® sets (supermarket, etc.); Numbers-Up®; Mr. Potato Head®; TOMY® toys	Develop turn-taking; increased attention; cooperation; social communication	MUSICAL ACTIVITIES: singing; ring dancing. GAMES: see above. NOVEL MECHANICAL TOYS: Childcraft Space Game®; train sets; water bingo. BOOKS: pop-up; sticker; photo (nature, places)
Older children with delays in expression and comprehension (ages 10-18+)	Continue developing language concepts and independent activity	Puzzles (possibly 50-100 piece jigsaw); Numbers-Up®; Colorforms®; magic writing boards; large activity books (coloring, simple word puzzles, mazes); Lego® sets (castle, racing track)	Encourage active turn taking; conversation; develop understanding of humorous language. Reinforce reading, number concepts	Making collages or posters; scavenger hunts; simple cooperative cooking. GAMES: Don't Tip the Waiter®; Bingo®; Uno®; Push Over®; Mouse-Trap®; go fish. READING GAMES: Junior Scrabble®; Boggle®; word scrabble
Junior high and adolescents (ages 11-20+)	Continue developing higher level language concepts	Jigsaw puzzles; Junior Games Magazine®. BOYS: model planes or cars; Lego® sets; remote control cars; racing sets. GIRLS: making collages; jewelry making kits. BOTH: hand-held LCD games	Develop appropriate social language and behavior in relaxed group situations	ONE TO ONE GAMES: Battleship®; Stratego®; cards; checkers. GROUP GAMES: Monopoly®; Life®; Pictionary®; Yahtzee®; Clue®; Scrabble®; Junior Trivial Pursuit®.THINKING/READING GAMES: Clue®; chess; Stratego®; Scotland Yard®; (educational games from Learning Well®)

COMPUTER PLAY CLASSES OFFERED:

Here's a note of interest for parents: classes are now being offered at COMPUPLAY Resource Centers, centers for families with special needs children. Computer play classes, drop-in centers, software lending libraries and in-service training are available at different sites. Through the use of adaptive equipment, innovative software and positive play methods, children ae able to create, explore, made decisions, play and learn using a computer.

COMPUPLAY Resource Centers, listed below, are staffed by trained COMPUPLAY professionals who have backgrounds in special education or related fields. All have been trained and certified in COMPUPLAY methods.

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Dave Schmitt

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Denver Children's Hospital
1056 E. 19th Avenue
Denver, CO 80218
(303) 861-6250
COMPUPLAY Instructor:
Wendy Danforth

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Rehab Center of Greater Waterbury
22 Tompkins Street
Waterbury, CT 06708
(203) 754-5141
COMPUPLAY Instructor:
Melissa Bartlett

ILLINOIS
COMPUPLAY
Clearbrook Lekotek Center
3705 Pheasant Drive
Rolling Meadows, IL 60008

COMPUPLAY
Easter Seal Rehab Center
1230 North Highland Avenue
Aurora, IL 60506
(312) 896-1961

COMPUPLAY
National Lekotek Center
2100 Ridge Avenue
Evanston, IL 60204
(313) 328-0001

COMPUPLAY
Lekotek: West Suburban Special Recreation Association
2915 N. Maple Street
Franklin Park, IL 60131
(312) 455-2100

(more listings on page 7)

be a part of a social community; how to be informal and conversational; how to give and take with another human being. Play is learning through trial and error; it cannot be graded, documented or judged on its merit.

Summer is a great time for play. There are so many more opportunities to explore and experiment with toys and different substances—the water and sand at the shore, outdoor recreational equipment, etc. Since most children with special needs require constant reinforcement of what they have learned all year long, play is the perfect way to "work" over the summer, not only to maintain skills but also to learn new concepts in a subtle, fun way. Here are some hints to consider.

Children with special needs:

- seem to prefer commercial toys they see on TV or that their siblings play with, over some of the more "abstract" educational toys.
- initiate more topics or requests when they select their own highly motivational toy.
- like colorful toys that have some aspect of movement, either manual or mechanical.
- enjoy when an adult engages them in play by sitting on the floor with them or by using "high

drama" in play—puppets that have different "voices," employing colorful words such as "bang!," "whee-e-e!"

Home is a natural context for play since children can be themselves, surrounded by their own comforting possessions. Parents can set the stage for play by providing a variety of motivational toys and modeling their use, or by actively playing with their child (or encouraging a sibling to do so) in activities both child and parent enjoy. Even though "play is a child's work," play should not be forced or made to feel like work.

On pages 4 and 5 is a chart listing toys and activities, according to developmental levels, that parents may find especially useful during the summer months. Possible goals are also included to give an overview of different communication skills that can be acquired through play.

Additional ideas and methods for incorporating play into school and home programming can be found in:

Adaptive Play for Special Needs Children: Strategies to Enhance Communication and Learning by Caroline Rumsey Musselwhite (San Diego, California: College Hill Press, 1986).

Learning can be fun with computers

by Leah Spring, Special Education Teacher

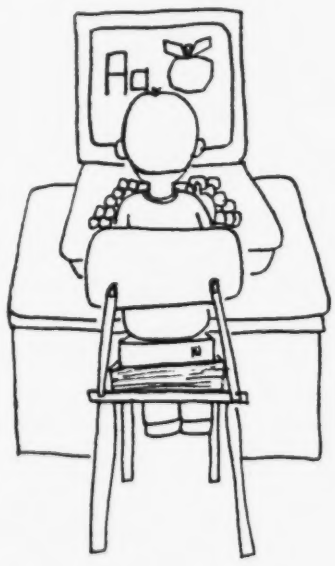
A computer can be a wonderful learning tool for the special child. Here are some reasons why:

- Children who have demonstrated little ability to attend to their school work often love to work at the computer. It seems to hold the attention of even the most distractable child.
- Children who have difficulty relating to others find quiet work at the computer to be a less stressful way to learn. Figuring out how a program works can be a good way for a parent and child or a group of several children to interact.
- The stimulating visuals, interesting sounds and opportunity to touch the computer keyboard or joystick keep the child alert and interested.
- Many special children have poor handwriting skills. Learning to type and illustrate their thoughts and feelings on the computer helps them to succeed in an area that has always been a source of frustration for them.

There is a variety of software on the market for every age level. Many of the early learning programs require only very simple responses from the child. A few stickers placed on the keys required to run a program may be all the assistance a child needs to work independently. If the child does not yet have sufficient motor skills to operate the standard keyboard, adaptive devices and modified keyboards can be hooked up to your computer. The computer is now being widely used as a communication tool for non-verbal individuals. The computer's voice is used in conjunction with communication boards or symbolic systems to do the talking for those who have something to say but can't speak.

Hints for parents: before you invest in a computer for home use or in educational software, check with your child's teacher to see if the child has indeed shown an interest in the school computers You may also be able to reserve computer time and software at your local library.

Don't be afraid of computers. Most software is self-explanatory and you don't need to be an expert on computers to get started. You just may discover a great activity that will educate your child while he is having fun.



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PSYCHOLOGIST'S CORNER:

What is play therapy?

by George Popper, Ph. D.

The many different types of psychotherapy currently in use today each reflect the particular orientation of the therapist as to what is the most effective way to help the patient feel better about himself. In most instances a therapist will use an approach in which the patient does most of the talking. Listening with what some have referred to as a "third ear," the therapist will develop an understanding of the person's problem and, in a sense, what "makes them tick." The goal is to help the client overcome difficulties so that he are happier and better adjusted. An important element in this process is language. The client says something, the therapist listens and says something, and the client responds in some fashion. All of this assumes that each person in this interaction can comprehend what the other is saying. If the client happens to be an adult, then the interchange is fairly straightforward. If the client happens to be a child, the situation is different. For one thing, children do not usually have the same ability to verbally express such things as emotions. Unlike most adults, children do not have a tolerance for sitting in an office talking to someone they don't know very well for an hour or so. Children have a need to get up and move about. Play therapy thus provides them with an opportunity to do just that while at the same time getting the help they need.

Play therapy is not just play. The play activities are carefully chosen for their therapeutic rather than recreational value. During play, the child shows many feelings about himself that could not be revealed in any other way.

Emotions and emotional expression are particularly troublesome for a child. As adults, we have learned to express our anger and frustration in socially acceptable ways. But what of children? Are they allowed to feel anger and frustration? If a child yells or screams, he is often punished for it. The tantrum stops, but the feeling persists. In a play therapy setting, a therapist might recreate the scenario using dolls or other play items. It is within this setting that the child learns to express a genuine feeling without fear that he will be punished or that he will have to face scorn or disapproval. Through the use of play therapy, a child can be helped to express feelings appropriately.

We live in times where children are subject to stresses unthinkable only a few years ago. Instances of child abuse and neglect occupy too many of today's headlines. Our children must also contend with the traumas of divorce, problems at school and the pressures of a competitive society. As a result some children do develop problems and require the kind of help that only play therapy and a trained practitioner can provide.

Illustrations by Leah Spring